

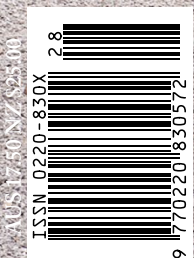
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Australasian Art & Culture



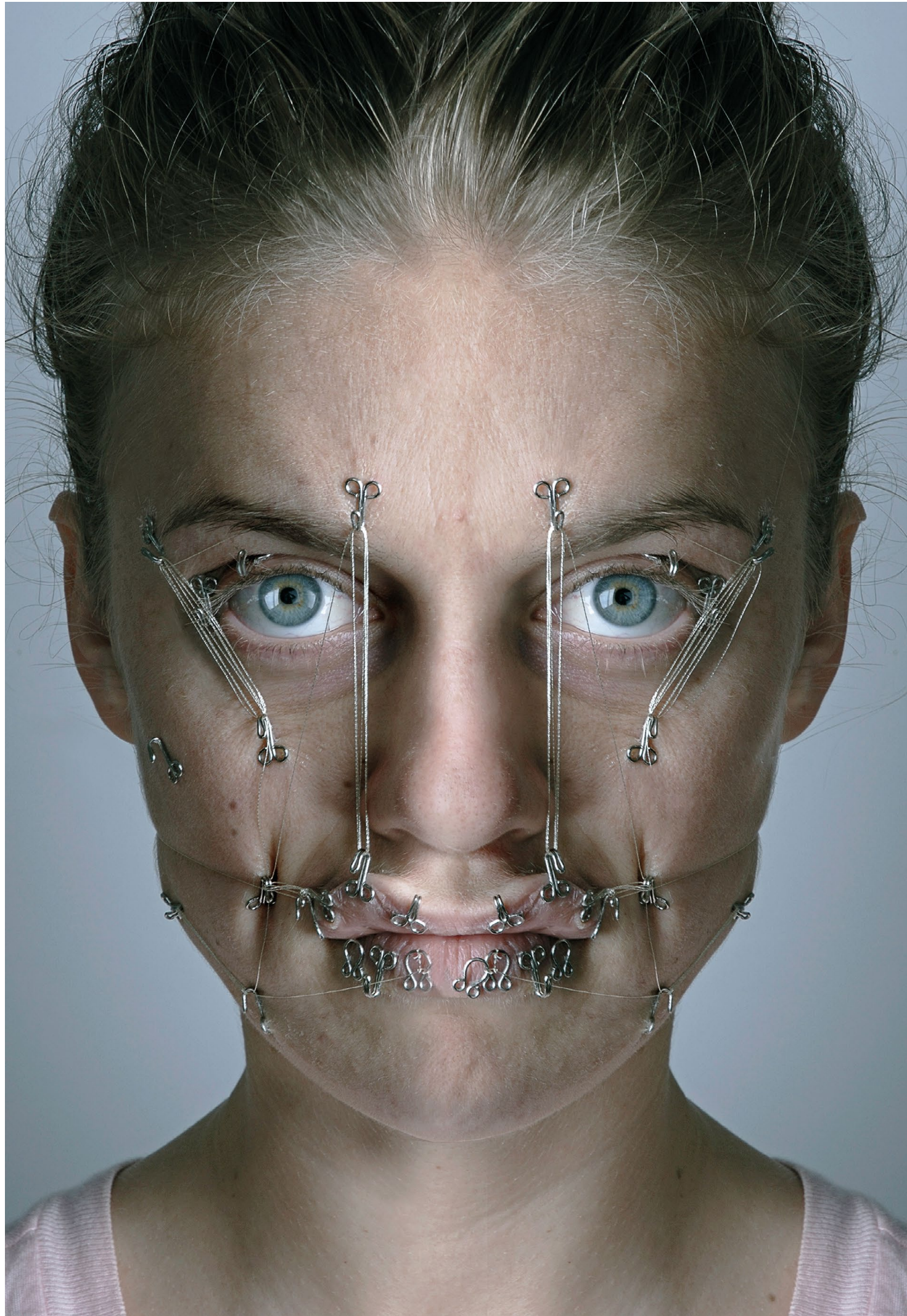
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Lime Cordiale, Lucy McCrae, Adam Cullen, Emily Floyd,
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MARGINS · LUCY MCRAE

The Body Architect

Will she be the first artist on the moon? *VAULT* spoke to artist Lucy McRae ahead of her first survey at the National Gallery of Victoria, *Lucy McRae: Body Architect*, about her ambitions for outer space and beyond.

WRITTEN by EMMA-KATE WILSON

Lucy McRae has defined her art practice as a 'body architect', blending the space between art, science, pop culture, business and technology and working collectively for the fast approaching future world. The artist now lives in LA, a city where space travel enters casual conversation and genetic engineering is a regular practical job for the people who sit next to her on the plane. Alongside all of this she is currently the subject of a major survey in Australia.

I read that you wanted to be one of the artists invited to space. How does this play into your practice?

I went to SpaceX a couple of years ago and saw shuttles being craned above my head and it is hard to believe that it won't happen. Elon Musk's mission for SpaceX is to colonise Mars. NASA is planning to put another person on the moon in 2024, which is the same year that SpaceX is hoping to leave for Mars.

Before making the film *The Institute of Isolation* (2016), I developed my own astronaut training

and for 18 months I did weird high endurance training, imagining that I was going to space. *The Institute of Isolation* is an observational, fictional documentary exploring the body beyond Earth. It explores the design of physical experiences and interior space as a way to improve human performance; architecture and interior spaces are designed as tools to benefit humans. I'm the protagonist, moving through various sensory chambers, testing my body.

How do you envision that attitude towards space for the Melbourne audience?

Australia has one of the largest biotech markets in the world. It is exciting for various reasons: one, biotech is one of the top three fastest-growing industries; two, genetic engineering is shaping the future of human evolution. There are many platforms in Melbourne dedicated to merging science and art. Uniting local creative talent with Melbourne's dominating biotech industry gives real power to the future.



What does this have to do with space? I believe genetic engineering offers huge clues when it comes to the body performing long-term in space; it is a long bow – and caution is paramount – but editing human and animal DNA to create a hybrid organism that could withstand the extreme conditions in space is one scenario biotech is challenging.

You mentioned pop music as well. How does this play into touch, the body and technology?

My first client was the musician Robyn. [McRae collaborated with the artist on the music video for 'Indestructible.'] I realised that music videos – pop, fashion, beauty – are places to test out new ideas. You'll see now the transhuman aesthetic that's happening in some of the mainstream media, such as injecting 3D forms underneath the skin or manipulating our faces so we're unrecognisable by algorithms. These music videos are, again, examples of manipulating the body or creating these clones of the body through music to talk to the fringes of culture about serious topics.

There are many examples of public figures taking a greater interest in their social perception. How do you relate to this and see yourself in this role?

I love using this analogy: miners used to carry caged canaries into tunnels and the canaries would die if dangerous gases were released. There is a real similarity between the work that artists do – we pick up on very subtle vibrations, whether they are warnings or sensations of what to expect.

My work, *Compression Cradle* (2019) has just finished its debut exhibition at La Triennale di Milano; it is an immersive, participatory experience. The cradle looks at how we're moving towards a touch crisis where we're inundated with technology, to the point of anxiety; in the future, will technology vie for our affection because of our obsession with digital?

The NGV exhibition is an excellent example of this, to speak about the future through playful, whimsical participatory, immersive experiences. My role is to ask impossible questions, via built worlds that elevate science and prepare us for what's coming.

How do you envision the future of art in technology?

I'm interested in a technology called optogenetics, developed by Professor Ed Boyden at MIT. It treats the brain like a radio, and through focused beams of light and electricity, you can refashion significant chunks of our sensors, triggering pleasure, or erasing memory. If you think about this technology from an architectural point of view, I want to ask, can we design spaces or environments that shift human behaviour?

We are in the thick of a dual revolution: info-technology and biotechnology – specifically, genetic engineering. I love this quote by Adam Zaretzy: "Scientists are leading contemporary art..." Gene collages; cutting out faulty DNA to replace it with something perfect.

I was on a plane a couple of weeks ago going from LA to San Francisco, and I met someone who had actually edited his one-year-old son, not only choosing his eye colour and height but his healthy disposition to all disease. His five-year-old brother is unedited. Hmmm.

How can artists construct responses to this?

For complex science to reach the masses, I believe it needs a story: to be communicated in tangible, familiar and physical ways. I think through films or machines that hug you – galleries are ultimate platforms to compel viewers and to beg questions about our future.

It goes back to the original question, the democratisation of ethics – where do we all sit with this and who is deciding what is okay and what isn't okay? This is something we all need to have a stake in because once we change the body that is forever, for generations and generations to come. Now more than ever, art is such a vital and critical platform; science is changing the course of evolution, and so can art. **V**

Lucy McRae: Body Architect runs at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne until February 9, 2020.

ngv.vic.gov.au

lucymcrae.net

Top
Lucy McRae, artist and designer, inside *Lucy McRae: Body Architect* at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia
Photo: Eugene Hyland

Opposite
Top to bottom
Left to right
LUCY MCRAE
Evolution, 2008
colour digital image

LUCY MCRAE
Germination day 1, 2008
colour digital image

LUCY MCRAE
Germination day 8, 2008
colour digital image

LUCY MCRAE
Biometric mirror, 2018
still from interactive video algorithm
commissioning agent
Science Gallery Melbourne

Page 90
LUCY MCRAE
Hook and eyes, 2008
colour digital image

Courtesy the artist and National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
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